

ORIGINAL

#6 | B'NAI

ADDRESS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



PRESENTED TO THE JOHN F. KENNEDY LODGE OF B'NAI B'RITH

WASHINGTON, D.C.

APRIL 12, 1989

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I AM DEEPLY HONORED TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF YOUR "PROFILES IN COURAGE AWARD." IT IS ENOUGH TO MAKE EVEN A SURGEON HUMBLE ... AND THAT'S SAYING QUITE A LOT, AS MANY OF YOU KNOW.

THIS IS AN AWARD THAT'S BEEN GIVEN TO A NUMBER OF OTHER PEOPLE WHOM I HAVE ADMIRERD OVER THE YEARS. THEY ARE ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO SHOWED GREAT PERSONAL COURAGE IN THEIR LIVES AND WHO DEALT WITH THEIR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS FROM A STRONG MORAL BASE.

THEIR VERY NAMES RECALL A PARTICULAR TIME OF TESTING AND WE
REVIVE THEIR MEMORIES THAT THEY MAY SOMEHOW HELP US RESPOND TO
THE TESTS OF OUR OWN TIME.

EARL WARREN ... CHARLES EVERS ... FATHER HESBURGH ...
MENACHEM BEGIN AND ANWAR SADAT ... AND ELIE WIESEL, ONE OF THE
VERY SPECIAL PERSONALITIES OF THIS CENTURY.

ALL WERE OR ARE INDIVIDUALS WHOSE WHOLE LIVES HAVE BEEN AN
INSPIRATION TO YOU ... TO ME ... AND TO PEOPLE EVERYWHERE.

I'VE LOOKED UP TO THEM ... AND NOW YOUR AWARD COMMITTEE HAS
SAID THAT TONIGHT I CAN BE COUNTED AMONG THAT EXCEPTIONAL
COMPANY.

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW DEEPLY I APPRECIATE THAT OPINION AND HOW HIGHLY I VALUE THIS AWARD.

A WEEK OR TWO AGO, AS I PAUSED FOR A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT THIS EVENING'S EVENT, I COULDN'T HELP BUT BE STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT I WILL BE COMING HERE TO THIS PODIUM BECAUSE OF THINGS I HAVE WANTED TO DO AND CHOSE TO DO ... AND ALSO BECAUSE OF THINGS I WAS SUDDENLY REQUIRED TO DO, WHETHER I WANTED TO DO THEM OR NOT.

YES, I WAS A PHILADELPHIA SURGEON FOR MANY YEARS -- APPARENTLY NOT AS TUNEFUL AN OCCUPATION AS BEING A GREAT PHILADELPHIA LAWYER.

NEVERTHELESS, BEING A SURGEON WAS SOMETHING I WANTED VERY MUCH TO DO ... AND DID DO FOR ALMOST FOUR DECADES ... AND THE MEMORY OF THOSE YEARS IS A GREAT SOURCE OF PERSONAL PRIDE AND SATISFACTION.

AND FOR THE PAST 8 YEARS I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVING A MUCH LARGER CONSTITUTENCY, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, AS THEIR SURGEON GENERAL.

I KNOW I CHANGED THE WAY SOME THINGS WERE DONE IN PHILADELPHIA. I GUESS, FROM YOUR WARM RECEPTION THIS EVENING, I MAY HAVE CHANGED SOME THINKING HERE AS WELL.

IT WOULD BE FUN TO SAY THAT THIS WAS ALL ONE-WAY, THAT I INFLUENCED OTHER PEOPLE. BUT LIFE ISN'T LIKE THAT, AS YOU KNOW. AND THAT'S A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT I WANT TO TALK ABOUT FOR JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES, WITH YOUR INDULGENCE.

MANY PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE TO THE MAKING OF A SURGEON GENERAL. BUT ONE WHO IS RECOGNIZED FOR COURAGE ... THAT'S A DIFFERENT MATTER. AND FOR THAT I HAVE TO GO BACK TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN FOR ME THE MODELS OF COURAGE AND THE EXEMPLARS OF THE GREATNESS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

AND I'M TALKING ABOUT CHILDREN ... THE CHILDREN OF PHILADELPHIA ... THE CHILDREN OF WASHINGTON, D.C. ... THE CHILDREN OF OUR COUNTRY ... AND THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD.

IN MEDICINE AND IN PUBLIC HEALTH YOU SEE CHILDREN AT THEIR MOST VULNERABLE ... WHEN THEY'RE HURT AND IN PAIN, WHEN THEY'VE BEEN ABANDONED, AND WHEN THEIR FUTURE SEEMS TO BE ESPECIALLY DIM. THAT'S WHEN I'VE SEEN THEM OVER MANY YEARS.

AND THEY'VE BEEN VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE IN THOSE PAINFUL, TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES.

THROUGHOUT MY CAREER IN PEDIATRIC SURGERY I WAS TAUGHT SOME VALUABLE LESSONS BY THOSE CHILDREN ... LESSONS OF HOPE, OF OPTIMISM, OF CHARITY, OF GOOD HUMOR, OF HEROISM ... AND OF COURAGE.

I WAS TAUGHT MANY LESSONS ABOUT THE GENEROSITY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT ... A QUALITY THAT I BELIEVE EVERYBODY HAS AS A CHILD, BUT THAT MOST OF US GRADUALLY SEEM TO LOSE IN PROPORTION TO THE NUMBER OF YEARS WE LIVE.

SO I MUST SAY THAT I WAS VERY FORTUNATE -- DURING MY LONG AND RATHER CHECKERED PROFESSIONAL CAREER -- TO HAVE HAD DAILY AND VERY CLOSE CONTACT WITH A POPULATION OF HUMAN BEINGS WHO DEMONSTRATED THE VERY HIGHEST AND MOST SUBLIME HUMAN TRAITS.

I OWE CHILDREN A GREAT DEAL. WE ALL DO.

AND THAT FEELING OF GRATITUDE AND INDEBTEDNESS HAS CERTAINLY BEEN PART OF MY MOTIVATION TO CONTINUE TO WORK ON BEHALF OF ...

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ...

OF CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DEFICITS OF ONE KIND OR
ANOTHER ...

CHILDREN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT ... WHO HAVE
BEEN CRIMINALLY ASSAULTED ...

AND ON BEHALF OF THE NEWEST CATEGORY OF CHILD VICTIMS ...

THOSE CHILDREN WHO HAVE BECOME THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF
THE CURRENT PLAGUE OF AIDS.

SO I'VE DONE SOME THINGS ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN BECAUSE I'VE
WANTED TO. AND I'M HAPPY THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO.

BUT I'VE ALSO DONE SOME THINGS THAT I HAD TO DO BECAUSE I WAS WHERE I WAS AT THE TIME.

THAT'S BEEN ESPECIALLY TRUE DURING THESE PAST 8 YEARS, AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL.

I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE NECESSARILY GONE LOOKING TO TAKE A STAND ON "BABY DOE" OR "BABY JANE DOE," IF I HAD REMAINED IN PHILADELPHIA.

I WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY INTERESTED IN THOSE CASES -- AND MAYBE I'D HAVE WRITTEN SOMETHING ABOUT THEM FOR THE NEWSPAPERS OR FOR ONE OR ANOTHER PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL.

BUT INSTEAD I SPENT THE BETTER PART OF TWO YEARS WORKING ON BEHALF OF THE "BABY DOES" OF THIS WORLD, TRYING TO GET MY COLLEAGUES IN MEDICINE, LAW, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND GOVERNMENT TO MAKE SOCIETY A SAFER, MORE HUMANE PLACE FOR THEM.

I'M GLAD I HAD THAT OPPORTUNITY ... GLAD THAT I WAS WHERE I WAS, WHEN THOSE QUESTIONS CAME UP ... AND GLAD THAT I COULD HELP IMPROVE AN OTHERWISE TRAGIC AND PROFOUNDLY UNFAIR SITUATION.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, IT WAS ALSO ON MY WATCH THAT THE TIME ARRIVED FOR US TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY.

YOU SAY IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH COURAGE. MAYBE SO ...
I'M NOT THE BEST JUDGE OF THAT.

BUT I DO KNOW IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH ANGER ... MY OWN
ANGER ... AT THE ARROGANCE, THE INSOLENCES, THE AUDACITY, AND THE
SHEER BRASS OF AN INDUSTRY THAT CONTINUES TO VIGOROUSLY PUSH A
PRODUCT THAT IS, BY EVERY SCIENTIFIC STANDARD, A CLEAR AND
PRESENT DANGER TO THE HEALTH OF MANKIND.

AND I AM ESPECIALLY ANGRY AT THE CIGARETTE INDUSTRY'S
SPECIFIC STRATEGY OF TARGETING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS THEIR
NEXT GENERATION OF "REPLACEMENT SMOKERS." NOT JUST HERE IN THE
UNITED STATES, BUT IN THE LESS DEVELOPED AND UNDEVELOPED NATIONS
OF THE WORLD.

I DON'T KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT COURAGE ... BUT I DO KNOW IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DOWNRIGHT COWARDICE IF THIS SURGEON GENERAL HAD NOT TAKEN A FIRM AND UNCOMPROMISING STAND AGAINST THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY AND ITS OWN PRIVATE WAR ON CHILDREN AND HEALTH.

IN A SENSE, MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY WAS GOOD TRAINING FOR WHAT I WAS CALLED UPON TO DO IN REGARD TO AIDS.

THIS DEADLY VIRUS ALSO FLOURISHES OUTSIDE THE NORMAL RULES OF SCIENCE AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT.

THE AIDS VIRUS ALSO CHALLENGES US TO SPEAK OPENLY ABOUT THE UNSPEAKABLE ... ABOUT HIGH-RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND DRUG ABUSE BEHAVIOR ... ABOUT SEX EDUCATION ... ABOUT RACE ... AND ABOUT EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE.

OVER 1,200 CHILDREN HAVE BEEN BORN WITH AIDS, BECOMING INFECTED BECAUSE THEIR MOTHER'S WERE CARRYING THE VIRUS. THERE'S VERY LITTLE HOPE FOR THOSE CHILDREN.

SOCIETY IS BEING ASKED TO BE COMPASSIONATE -- AND IT MUST BE COMPASSIONATE -- TOWARD THOSE CHILDREN. ALSO -- DIFFICULT THOUGH IT MAY BE -- WE MUST ALSO SHOW COMPASSION TO THEIR MOTHERS AS WELL, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY LIVE LIVES OF HIGH RISK AND LOW ESTEEM, BOTH PERSONAL AND SOCIAL.

WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THESE THINGS AND WE ARE TAKING ACTION AS WELL, BECAUSE MANY LIVES DEPEND ON OUR ABILITY TO SEE THE HUMAN BEING BENEATH THE DISEASE ... TO SEE THE CHILD BENEATH THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

WE'RE TRYING TO GET A HANDLE ON THE AIDS VIRUS SO THAT WE CAN PRODUCE A VACCINE, BUT SO FAR THAT HANDLE HAS ESCAPED OUR GRASP. IN THE ABSENCE OF A VACCINE, ABOUT THE ONLY WEAPONS WE HAVE AGAINST THIS DISEASE ARE THE WEAPONS OF EDUCATION ... AND CHARITY ... AND COMPASSION.

AS I SAY, I WAS TAUGHT A GREAT DEAL ABOUT LIFE BY MY PATIENTS ... CHILDREN WITH SERIOUS, LIFE-THREATENING HANDICAPS ... AND CHILDREN SMILING THROUGH THE TEARS OF A PERMANENTLY DAMAGED LIFE.

BUT I WAS ALSO TAUGHT A GREAT DEAL BY THE ADVERSARIES I'VE MET, WHILE SERVING AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL ... BY PREJUDICE AND FEAR ... BY DISEASE ... BY THE ONSET OF OLD AGE ... AND BY TOBACCO. AND THIS WAS THE MAIN THING THESE ADVERSARIES TAUGHT ME:

THAT I MUST DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO
MAKE SURE THAT THEY DON'T WIN ... BUT THAT
THE REST OF US DO.

ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS HONOR. IT IS ONE I
WILL ALWAYS CHERISH.

THANK YOU.

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